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BILLERICA.

A CENTENNIAL ORATION,

BY THE

REV. ELIAS NASON,

JULY 4, 1876.

"Cari sunt parentes, cari liberi, propinqui, familiares; sed omnes omnium
caritates patria una complexa est."—CICERO.

LOWELL:

PRINTED BY MARDEN AND ROWELL.

1876.

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INTRODUCTORY.

A meeting of citizens called by notices from the pulpits on the Sabbath previous, was held in the Town Hall, Billerica, June 6, 1876, to see what measures should be taken for the fit celebration of the coming Fourth of July, the nation's Centennial.

After consultation, the following Committee of Arrangements:

HON. GEO. P. ELLIOTT, *Chairman.*

ALBERT D. STANTON, *Secretary.*

ALLAN BOTTOMLY,	Dea. S. H. KING,
Dea. EDWARD SPAULDING,	J. O. RICHARDSON,
JOSEPH JAQUITH,	GEO. E. S. KINNEY,
C. H. TALBOT,	Wm. S. GLEASON,
F. P. HILL,	DR. GEO. A. MUNROE,
C. H. HILL,	E. F. DICKINSON,
L. G. BRYANT,	ANTHONY JONES,
CHAS. W. LUND,	F. A. MOREY,

Was appointed, with full powers to make such provision as they found practicable and expedient at so late a day. They were fortunately able to secure the services of the Rev. Elias Nason to give the oration, and other arrangements will be indicated in the following brief account of the exercises.

The celebration was held in a beautiful pine grove on the farm of Gardiner Parker, Esq., beside the Concord River, near the Carlisle road. The intense heat, oppressive in many places, was tempered by a fresh breeze here, and the day was delightful for such a commemoration. Seats and stands for the orator and musicians were provided by the town, bountiful tables were spread by the ladies, and all was made very attractive to the goodly company of old and young assembled.

At ten o'clock, the Hon. George P. Elliott, president of the day, called the meeting to order and in brief words suggested the great significance of the day and the hopes of the new century opening before the nation.

Prayer was offered by the Rev. C. C. Hussey, the Declaration of Independence was read by Samuel Tucker, Esq., principal of the Howe School, and the Rev. Elias Nason delivered the following oration, which held the close and unwearyed attention of the audience to its close.

After the recess which was then taken for dinner, the exercises were resumed, and Mr. Frederick P. Hill, toastmaster, offered the following sentiments, which were accompanied by some very pleasant speaking:

“The Day we Celebrate,” responded to by the Rev. C. P. H. Nason.

“Our Country,” responded to by the Rev. C. C. Hussey.

“Our Country’s President,” responded to by the Rev. W. H. Fish.

“The Commonwealth of Massachusetts,” responded to by Dr. F. V. Noyes.

“The Honorable Old Town of Billerica,” responded to by L. W. Faulkner, Esq.

“Our Pilgrim and Puritan Ancestors,” responded to by the Rev. H. A. Hazen.

“The Medical Profession,” responded to by Dr. Geo. A. Munroe.

“The Concord River,” responded to by a poem written by Dr. D. Parker.

“The Ladies,” responded to by W. W. Warren, Esq.

“The Spirit of ’76,” responded to by the Band.

Owing to the lateness of the hour, other toasts, as to “The Clergy,” “The Public Schools,” “The Press,” &c., were omitted.

A concert and fireworks in the evening closed a day which all must remember with pleasure.

ORATION.

MR. PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

It is with no ordinary emotions that we assemble in this charming grove on the margin of the Concord River and in the full bloom and beauty of the year, to commemorate the centennial birthday of our national freedom.

One hundred years have rolled away since the grand old Declaration of Independence, just now so well read to you, was amidst the ringing of bells and pealing of artillery, proclaimed to a brave people then in arms and pledging life and sacred honor to sustain the cause of civil liberty.

They did sustain it. By wisdom, valor, hardship, sacrifice, which command the admiration of the world, they waded through a seven years' bloody war, most gloriously won their title to be free, and laid, with unsullied hands, the corner-stone of the majestic temple of our civil grandeur, which, after the storm-beats of a century, rises still resplendently, the hope of nations, and bears upon its massive walls, "Salvation," on its golden portals, "Praise."

It would be a most delightful task to trace the progress of our nation in respect to science, literature, art, mechanical invention and industrial enterprise, from the ringing of the old Liberty bell in Philadelphia on the natal morn of freedom to the magnificent centennial display of the resources of our country in that city at the present time, but it seems more appropriate to this occasion, and it is also in accordance with the recommendation of the chief executive, that omitting such an inspiring theme, I should rather turn your thoughts to some special points in our own local history, which though of minor consequence, still may come in as a mosaic, etching, or rosette, to enhance the beauty of the national temple, and which though familiar to you, will, I think, from ties of consanguinity and proximity of place, ever command your attention and respect.

For name and situation the town of Billerica is very beautiful. It was so called, you are aware, from Billericay in Essex County, England, whence some of its early settlers came. Pronounce it as you will, "Billericky," "Billeracky," Billereiky," the origin of the word is *villa rica*, a rich village; and rich indeed this village is in local scenery—hill and glade and river; local story—Indian, French, and revolutionary; in patriotism, intelligence and every social virtue. It is worthy of its fair classic name. Like Billericay in England it is built upon an eminence which overlooks the valley of the Merrimack River, as that the

valley of the Thames, and the number of people in the English and the American Billerica is now just about the same. As an acknowledgement of the honor done to her by the adoption of her name, the mother town sent to her only daughter a church bell on which was inscribed: "The people of Billericay, England, to the people of Billerica, New England," and its clear, silvery tones long announced from the old belfry on the common the hour of prayer, or the departure of a soul.

Originally the extensive tract of land lying on the Shawshin, and between the Concord and the Merrimack Rivers bore the emphoneous Indian name of Shawshin—meaning "serpentine," or "meandering," and it was called the "Shawshin country." It was the frontier of Cambridge on the northwest; and near the confluence of the Concord with the Merrimack River dwelt the Wamesit Indians, who under their pacific chieftain, Passaconaway, maintained a friendly intercourse with the few English adventurers who had established trading-posts along these rivers.

In 1642 the land was partially surveyed by Capt. Simon Willard and conditionally granted to the town of Cambridge. The Rev. John Eliot made his first visit to the Wamesit Indians in 1647, and it is probable that settlements were commenced in this locality as early as the middle of the 17th century. It appears that in January, 1654, the following persons were living in what was then called the "Towne of Shawshin," and they may justly be denominated the fathers of the town of Billerica; since it was in answer to their petition that the town was incorporated on the 29th day of May, 1655, and christened by the name of Billerica. I speak their names with pleasure and respect, since they were honorable men, and many of their lineal descendants are associated in the festivities of this delightful day. Ralph Hill, senior, William French, John Stearns, William Patten, George Farley, Ralph Hill, junior, John Crow, James Parker, John Parker, Robert Parker, Henry Jefts, William Chamberlain, Jonathan Danforth.

As then incorporated, this town had for its boundaries Merrimack River and Chelmsford on the north, Andover on the northeast, Woburn on the southeast, with Cambridge and Concord on the south and west. It embraced the present town of Tewksbury, a part of the town of Bedford, Carlisle and the most beautiful section of the city of Lowell. It was equal in extent to a European dukedom. It was at that period almost an entire wilderness, covered with a heavy growth of pine, cedar, oak, chestnut, birch and maple timber. The bear, the wolf, and wildcat prowled in the deep forest; the beaver built its dam of logs across the streams. The red man visited the falls of the Concord and the Merrimack Rivers for shad and salmon fishing and for the feast of the powow Passaconaway.

"And merrily when the feast was done,
On the fire-lit green the dance begun,
With the squaws' shrill stave, and deeper hum
Of old men beating the Indian drum."

WHITTIER.

The Indian raised a little corn and beans upon the intervals, and used a clam shell for a hoe and a sand pit for his store-house and his burial place. But few memorials of his race remain. The broken outline of a mound that marked his territory, or a skeleton, an arrowhead, a gouge, a bit of wampum, or a tomahawk now and then turned up in ploughing, and the fair name of "Shaw-shine," alone attest that he once had here existence. The savage has no desire, no method to perpetuate his memory. Indeed, why should it be perpetuated?

As we look at the familiar names of the original proprietors of this town upon the records; as we see the walls and buildings they erected, the fields they cleared and planted; as we cross the streams and climb the eminences they named, such as "Content Brook," "Fox Hill," "Gilson Hill;" as we visit the graves they sleep in and see the forms and faces of their descendants here amongst us, it seems but a brief period since they affixed their several names to the petition for incorporation; yet when we set ourselves to measure time by great events, we find that we have to travel far to reach the birthday of the town of Billerica. It is indeed almost one-eighth of the time that has intervened between us and the advent of our Saviour.

To arrive at 1655 we must pass by our dreadful civil war, the introduction of the steamship and the railroad, the exploits of Napoleon the First, the atrocities of the reign of terror, the days of our illustrious Washington and our grand old Revolution; we must traverse the times of the old French wars, of George the First, of Addison, Pope, Swift and the Spectator, go by the dark days of Salem Witchcraft, of the great English Revolution when the house of Stuart fell, of King Phillip's bloody war, of the fire of London, and come to the protectorate of Oliver Cromwell, whose Latin Secretary, John Milton, was then brooding over his immortal poem, "Paradise Lost."

There were when Billerica was incorporated but nine towns in Middlesex County; the governor and magistrates were appointed by the Lord Protector, and the manners and customs of the people were entirely different from our own. The fathers of this town were rigid puritans. They came to New England to escape the imperious mandates of the star chamber and that intolerance which prompted James the First to say: "I will make them conform, or I will harry them out of the kingdom." They loved religious liberty; they preferred to face the perils of the savage wilderness rather than to worship God in forms prescribed for them by king or prelate. They were hardy, brave, intelligent yeomen; prompt to meet danger, jealous of any encroachment on their civil rights and true as steel to the grand principle which is the very core and kernel of republican institutions, that in church, in state and town affairs the majority must rule.

The increase of the town was rapid. Within ten years from the date of incorporation lands were granted to Samuel Trull, John Trull, Nathaniel Hill, John Poulter, William Tay, Thomas Foster, Simon Crosby, Samuel Whitney, John Marshall, Thomas Willis, John Durant, John Kittredge, Roger Toothaker, Joseph Thompson, Peter Brackett, John Baldwin, James Patterson, Thomas

Hubbard, John Brackett, Robert Parker, William Hamlet, James Kidder, Samuel Kinsley, Golden More, Samuel Kemp, Jacob Brown, John Rogers, jr., Simon Bird, James Frost and Samuel Champney. The settlements were commenced along the right bank of the Concord River and in the valley of the Shawshine, in order that the meadows from which the main supply of hay was drawn might be readily accessible, and that the alewives, shad and salmon with which those streams then abounded might be easily secured. The industrious and accurate surveyor, Jonathan Danforth, was appointed to lay out the house lots in sections of ten or five acres to each citizen, the larger lots entitling the proprietor to 113 acres of upland and 12 acres of meadow, the other lots to one-half that quantity. The common land was to be used by every one in proportion to the extent of his domain, and a proprietor of a single lot, or less, could not dispose of it even to his children without permission from the selectmen, or "town's men," as they were sometimes called, who exercised much more of authority both in civil and in church affairs, than those now invested with that office.

We of the present generation, who in settling find all things in readiness for successful husbandry and for comfortable living, can hardly realize what unremitting toil, what backbone and perseverance it demanded of the emigrants to put this new town of the wilderness into "running order." The primeval trees of the forest had to be uprooted, houses and barns to be erected, fences to be made, roads to be laid out, bridges to be thrown across the streams, and mills to be set in motion; a church, a pillory and a pound had to be established, the wild beasts and savages to be kept at bay; and all this with but the slenderest means and rudest instruments.

It was a brave and beautiful thing to lay the foundation of such a town as this, since in such organizations we have the only pure and perfect democracy of which this badly governed world can boast. Here the people meet on equal terms, freely interchange opinions, cast their votes and have an even chance for office and for education. Here the manly virtues flourish; and here gush forth the clear and living springs of patriotism that feed and freshen the pulse-beat of the nation.

A city has some advantages, but many miseries; "a town," as Dr. Jeremy Belknap truly says, "consisting of a due mixture of hills, valleys and streams of water, the land well fenced and cultivated, the roads and bridges in good repair, decent inns for the refreshment of travellers and for public entertainment, the inhabitants mostly husbandmen, their wives and daughters domestic manufacturers, a suitable proportion of handcraft workmen and two or three traders, a physician and a lawyer, a clergyman of good understanding and exemplary morals, not a metaphysical, nor a polemic, but a serious practical preacher, a schoolmaster who should understand his business and teach his pupils to govern themselves, a social library annually increasing and under good regulations, a decent musical society, no intriguing politician, horse-jockey, gambler or sot; such a situation may be considered as the most favorable to local happiness of any which this world can afford." Such a town our forefathers founded, and for it let their names be held in perpetual remembrance.

The town was doubtless organized by the choice of public officers in 1655; but unfortunately the early records are so mutilated that it is impossible for us now to know who were the first men chosen to manage the municipal affairs. On the 9th day of November, 1659, it was agreed by a majority of the town, which until the present century seems to have performed the functions of a parish, as well as those of a municipality, that there should be a meeting-house, thirty feet long, twenty-seven feet wide, and three feet between the studs. Ralph Hill, senior, George Farley and Jonathan Danforth were to engage the workmen, and the roof was to be covered with thatch, or straw.

A year at least prior to this vote, the Rev. Samuel Whiting had been preaching here in the private dwelling-houses, and the people had agreed to give him in country produce if he should consent to be settled as their pastor, £40 for each of the first two years, £50 for the third year, £60 for the fourth, together with a ten acre lot and a comfortable house; also "to better his maintainance as the Lord should better their estates." On the 11th day of November, 1663, a church was organized with a few members, and the beloved minister ordained as pastor. The expenses of the occasion were £6, 1s. 8d., of which ardent spirits, we may well presume, from the custom of the olden times, formed no inconsiderable item. Joseph Thompson and James Frost were appointed deacons.

The first marriage in the place was that of Jonathan Danforth and Elizabeth Poulter, November 22d, 1654; the next was that of John Baldwin and Mary Richardson, solemnized by Capt. Edward Johnson of Woburn, May 15th of the year ensuing. The first white person born here was John Sterne (Stearns) son of John Sterne and his wife Sarah, who came into existence sometime during the second week in May of the last named year; and the first death that saddened the hearts of the people was that of Hannah Foster, daughter of Henry and his wife Sarah Foster, who departed this life in the first week of May, 1653. Where the remains of those who first deceased in town were laid we cannot now determine; but on the 10th of April, 1663, the public-spirited Ralph Hill, senior, "gave ye towne half an acre of land for ye burial place," which sacred spot, enlarged and beautified, has continued now for more than two centuries to receive to its silent trust the relics of the dead. The oldest inscription I have been able to decipher in it is the following:

"Here lies the Body of John Rogers, aged 74 years. Dyed, March 21, 1686."

The names of the first selectmen now legible in the records are John Parker, Lt. William French, Ralph Hill, senior, Thomas Foster and Jonathan Danforth. They were chosen March 5th, 1660, and at the same time John Sterne (Stearns) and John Baldwin were appointed assessors.

The meeting-house stood on the common near the site of the monument raised a few years since in honor of the soldiers of Billerica lost in the late war; the pound and the pillory, or "cage," as it was sometimes called, stood near it. The people were summoned to church by the beating of a drum, and the men brought their rude fire-locks with them to the service. The selectmen seated

the people in the meeting-house according “to age and pay;” for then, as in the days of Jesus, and I regret to add, as in our own days, the first seats in the synagogue were greatly coveted. Tythingmen were stationed with long poles in the corners to keep the boys in order, an hour-glass was placed on the pulpit to remind the preacher of the flight of time, and a sounding-board hung over his head to reflect his precious words into the ears of the congregation. “If he does not speak the truth,” whispered the “pagans,” as they denominated those outside of the church, “it will fall upon his pate and kill him.” The men of the congregation rose in front of the minister and sang congregationally from “the Bay Psalm Book,” one of the deacons giving out the psalm line by line, like this:

“The rivers on, of Babylon,
There where we did set down,
Yea, even then we mourned when,
We remembered Zion.”

It was sung to some doleful tune, as “Oxford,” or “St. Mary’s,” which had been learned by rote of some precentor who perhaps could read the notes of good old Henry Ainsworth’s Manual of Song. The women were not allowed to sing, nor were any musical instruments admitted into the sanctuary; it is indeed quite doubtful whether any thing of the kind, except the drum and jewsharp, was for many years heard in town. Our fathers had too much hard work to do to attend to music; and only three or four tunes were sung in the churches at this period.

In the year 1666 William Haile was paid £1 “for keeping ye meeting-house,” and it was voted on the 26th day of March of that year, that “ye keeper of ye Pound shall have 2d. for turning ye key.” In the year ensuing the town had as many as fifty-eight soldiers, and it was agreed to build a fortification of brick and stone, twenty-six feet long and twenty-two feet wide, for defence against the enemy.

In 1668 (Jan. 29th,) “the town declared that it formerly agreed to give Mr. Whiting one pound of butter upon every milch cow annually in part of pay;” but whether that butter ever “came” the clerk omitted to record. In the year ensuing, the town offered a reward of half a penny per head to any person who should kill a woodpecker, a blackbird or a “jaw”; and on the 13th of June, 1670, “did agree to give to Thomas Foster for his son Hopestill for his service to the company in drumming, 20s. for the time past.” Two years later “Thomas Crosby was chosen to keep a house of publick entertainment.” This tavern, together with the blacksmith’s shop, the fortification, and the mill already erected on Content Brook, was the place of resort of our forefathers for the discussion of the questions of the day, of which the movements of the savages and the division of the lands of the town were among the most important.

On the 17th of November, 1673, £1, 5s. was paid for “thatching ye meeting-house and ye straw;” also 10s. to Mr. Blood for “a woolff’s head.” Wolves were then very numerous and destructive to the sheep; the town subsequently paid many such rewards.

In 1671 the town ordered all its children and youth to be sent to Mr. Whiting for instruction in the Assembly's Catechism, on which celebrated work he preached a series of discourses to the parents. Though rigid in doctrine, the early settlers of Billerica were not morose. Under a rough exterior, they carried kindly hearts. From the records it is evident that they cared for one another and lent a helping hand to each other in time of need. As a body they were more intelligent than the settlers of some of the neighboring towns; they did not sign their names with a "John, his mark." They had a grand good minister—the town has always had grand good ministers—they had a grand good leader in Capt. Jonathan Danforth; the town has always had grand good leaders. They were less aristocratic in their pretensions than the settlers of some of our towns; there were but few who sneered at a man for hoeing corn without his gloves; there are but few who do it now; they cherished the sweet feelings of fraternity; the people here have always cherished the sweet feelings of fraternity; and cherish them more and more I trust they ever may; since what do we live for, ladies and gentlemen, but to do good and to communicate?

The affairs of the new town had proceeded prosperously for twenty years, when all upon a sudden peril came.

There were in 1675 not more than 40,000 white inhabitants in the entire state. These were sparsely scattered in towns remote from each other and occupying in many instances advanced positions in the wilderness. Philip, of Pokanoket, jealous of the encroachment of the English on the Indian territory, eager to avenge the death of his brother Alexander and the execution of the witnesses against the murderers of John Sausamon, indignant also that he and his people had in 1671 been deprived of fire-arms, determined in confederation with the other sachems to exterminate the hated pale faces, root and branch. He commenced his atrocities in Swansea on the 24th of June, 1675, and his swarthy warriors with the tomahawk and scalping knife hung like vampires for many months upon the borders of the English settlements. The savages fought in ambuscade, they encircled, they outnumbered the whites, they spared neither age, sex nor condition; they laid every dwelling-house and barn which they could reach in ashes; and hence the English on this continent, before or since that period, were never in such peril; never in proportion to their number underwent such loss of life and property as in that bloody war. It is marvellous, indeed, that any of them escaped.

"It is not known," says Mr. John Farmer in his excellent historical memoir of the Town of Billerica, "that this town received any essential injury during King Philip's war." Other writers have without examination copied him; but this town did suffer essential injury during that sanguinary contest, and there was an actual fight between our forefathers and the Indians just two hundred years ago on yonder hill. From their proximity to the Wamesit Indians, the inhabitants of the northerly part of the town abandoned their homes soon after the opening of the war and sought protection in those towns more strongly fortified;

some of the soldiers, also, were engaged in distant expeditions against the enemy.

On the 2d day of August, 1675, Timothy Farley, of this town, and a member of Capt. Thomas Wheeler's company, was killed with several others in an encounter with the Indians between a hill and a thick swamp at Quaboag, now Brookfield. Corporal John French of this town was in the same fight, and having shot an Indian, received while bringing up his gun a ball which cut off one of his thumbs and dangerously wounded him in the body near the shoulder. "In consideration of that weakness as to his wounds in the country's service," his town and county taxes were for several years abated, and he was allowed to sit in church at the table with Capt. John Lane and Mr. Crosby, while his wife was permitted to sit "in the front gallery with Mrs. Foster and those women placed there." (Town Records, p. 104.) Thus Billerica blood was spilled in the forefront of that great struggle, as we shall find it to have been in struggles yet to come.

On the 13th day of August, 1675, it was agreed in public meeting, "on account of the enemy being near," and "the warnings of God's providence upon our neighbors being very solemn and awful to prepare a place of safety for women and children," and Sergt. Foster, Sergt. Thompson, Samuel Manning and Jonathan Danforth were appointed "overseers of the same." As the work of devastation was seen to be approaching, twelve garrisons were established in October, that is, twelve houses were surrounded with palisades, the brush and underwood cleared away so as to afford no lurking place for the enemy, port-holes were made in the walls and soldiers stationed as a guard. To these garrisons the forty-eight families then in town were directed to repair. "The main garrison," says the Town Record, "and the last refuge in case of extremity," was the house of the Rev. Mr. Whiting, and he himself the commander. His house stood on Churnstaff Lane, between the Boston and Concord roads, but a short distance from the church, and the cost of fortifying it was £8, 6s. 9d. The other buildings fortified belonged severally to Ralph Hill, Thomas Foster, Simon Crosby, Thomas Patten, James Patterson, Jacob French, James Kidder, Jonathan Danforth, Timothy Brooks, George Farley and Job Lane. Mr. Richard Daniel, a gentleman who visited the Wamesit Indians with Mr. Eliot in 1674, and heard Wanalanet avow his acceptance of christianity, was also allowed to fortify his house. (Town Records, p. 121.)

Pent up in these narrow garrisons, the corn unharvested, provisions scanty, communication cut off, the families of this town, mourning* in some instances the loss of relatives, trembling at every footfall, and in momentary expectation of hearing the dreadful cry: "They are upon us!" must have passed the winter of 1675-6 in such anxiety as those doomed to utter ruin only can experience. It was the darkest day New England ever knew. But the enemy was still approaching. On the 10th of February, 1676, Lancaster was reduced to ashes; then Medfield, Groton, Marlborough were destroyed; then Chelmsford was attacked, and on the 10th of March, "two houses," Hubbard, the historian says,

"were burned in Billerica." On Sunday, the 9th of April, while the people were at church, the Indians suddenly "beset Billerica round about," shot down one of the people and with their fiendish warhoop advanced to the work of destruction; but the minister was a man of pluck, the people grasped their muskets and under the guidance of such men as Whiting, Danforth, Thompson, French and Crosby, presented such a front that the savages soon retreated and twelve days afterwards ent down Capt. Wadsworth and his followers in the town of Sudbury.

On the 12th of August the crafty Philip fell at Mount Hope, the garrison houses were thrown open and the people returned in peace to their own habitations. But the town was very poor and fears were entertained that it would have to be abandoned. From a petition made to the General Court, Oct. 12, 1676, for an abatement of taxes on account of losses sustained by the war, it appears that six persons with their families and cattle removed from the north part of the town, and that the charges for keeping garrison soldiers amounted to as much in all as the billeting of one man for 420 weeks. The petition also states that "many of our inhabitants are growne very low, severall persons at this time having no bread, corne, yet considerable families to provide for." (Mass. Archives, Military, p. 69.)

In 1684, Jonathan Danforth was chosen to represent the town in the General Court; it having been done prior to this period by Humphrey Davie of Boston, for which service the town presented him a "fat beast"; and it also granted a tract of land to John Dunkin for furnishing the animal and driving it to Boston. Other early representatives were Ralph Hill, Joseph Thompson, Samuel Manning, Thomas Richardson, John Stearns, George Brown and Oliver Whiting.

In 1688 occurred the downfall of the House of Stuart, and in consequence what was called "King William's War," during which the Indians, instigated by the French, again dug up the hatchet and set themselves upon the war path. Coming stealthfully upon the northern section of the town they massacred on the first day of August, 1692, Mrs. Anna, wife of Mr. Zachary Shed, and two of their children, Agnes and Hannah; Joanna, wife of Benjamin Dutton, and two of her children by a former husband, bearing the names of Mary and Benoni Dunkin—in all six persons; yet I find but very slight allusion to this tragic scene upon the records of the town. While the very trivial entry is made that at a meeting of the selectmen, Aug. 29th, "we had two pots of cidre and dinner for five men and halfe a pynt of liquor, two pots of silibub," the sad fate of the Shed, Dutton and Dunkin families is not referred to until a heavier calamity falls upon the town.

As an honest narrator, I am compelled to say, ladies and gentlemen, that there are now, and always have been, witches in this town of Billerica; many a man has been bewitched by them and hung at least to an apron-string; but it is painful to relate that Mrs. Martha Carrier who had recently removed hence to Andover, was arrested with her sister Mrs. Toothaker, and brought into the court at Salem for trial on the next day after the above-mentioned massacre took place. On the evidence of mischievous children mainly, she was convicted of

practising "certain detestable arts called witcherarts and sorceries," and was, though protesting her innocence to the last, inhumanly executed, with the Rev. George Burroughs and others, August 11th, 1692, on Gallows Hill in Salem. As a specimen of the evidence on which this good woman was convicted, one Foster "confessed," says Cotton Mather, "that the devil carried them on a pole to a witch meeting; but the pole broke and she hanging about Carrier's neck, they both fell down and she then received an hurt by the fall whereoff she was not at this very time recovered." Of her Cotton Mather roughly said: "This rampant hag was the person of whom the confessions of the witches and of her own children among the rest agreed that the devil had promised her that she should be Queen of Hell." He sat upon his horse and saw her and the other victims of this strange delusion executed; yet some people still laud Cotton Mather! O superstition! what a blot thou art upon the fair face of humanity! When as many as twenty had been executed and he saw the rope might reach his own neck, this politic divine, who was more the governor of the state than Sir William Phips himself, most prudently took off the thumbkins and admitted that the game had been too seriously played. (Upham's "Salem Witchcraft," vol. 2, p. 209.)

Thomas, the husband of Martha Carrier, died at Colchester, Conn., May 16, 1735, at the advanced age of 103 years, the oldest man that ever lived in Billerica; so you see, ladies and gentlemen, that marrying a witch, or burying a witch, or breathing the air of Billerica does not shorten one's days; and if any man here is now bewitched of a witch, I say, "be hanged to him, the witch, I mean, and may he live as long as good old Thomas Carrier and leave as many little witches behind him."

In the year 1693 I find this very cheering record, alike honorable to the spirit of the Rev. Mr. Whiting and the town: "Oct. 30. Our Reverend Pastor did set at libertie and free from his service Simon Negro, who hath been his servant about 30 and one years, being now about 40 years old, the which said Simon Negro the town of Billerica duly accept as an inhabitant amongst themselves."

This is the first instance of the manumission of a slave that I have seen recorded in the state of Massachusetts. Had Mr. Whiting lived in our day, he would have shaken hands with William L. Garrison, and I should have tipped my beaver very low to him.

In 1694 the thatched covered meeting-house was found to be too small to accommodate the people, and so on the 16th day of July, forty-five hands of the town and others came together at the beat of the drum to raise a new and larger one. It was an arduous task to lift the frame of that old church, forty-four feet long and forty wide; but the town clerk recorded that there was not a bone broken, and that "we concluded with a psalm of praise and returned thanks to God by our Reverend Pastor."

There was a distinction between a hat and a bonnet in those days. The women wore their bonnets right side up and vandyke handkerchiefs, so in finish-

ing the house an alley 3½ feet wide was made between the men and women's seats, and in other parts of the church tables were placed as lines of demarcation. At this period the men wore high slouched and broad-brimmed hats, long coats, short-clothes and silver knee-buckles; the women, hoods, kirtles, farthingales and high-heeled slippers. They spun and wove their own garments, and the living consisted of corn and rye bread, beef, pork, mutton, game, fish, bean porridge and pumpkin pie. The turnip was used instead of the potato. Orchards were early planted, and cider, often "roasted," that is heated over glowing coals and seasoned with a red pepper, was a common beverage. The people spoke of each other as "good man Dutton," "good wife Sheld," and never omitted civil or military titles, as "Corporal French," "Cornet Stearns," "Ensign Whiting," "Capt. Hill," "Landlord Crosby" and "Squire Kidder."

Although three or more "watches" were observed in town and a small party of horsemen kept continually on the scout, the Indians on the 5th of August 1695, entered stealthfully on the northern side of the Concord River, and killed in open day at one fell swoop, John and Thomas Rogers, Thomas Rogers, junior, the mother-in-law and five children of John Levistone, and Mary, the wife of Dr. Roger Toothaker, who lived in the house still standing at the junetion of the Middlesex Canal with Concord River. John Rogers was shot by an arrow in the neck and expired in wrenching the fatal instrument from his wound; and two of his children, Daniel and Mary, were taken captives. A woman in the house, which stood not far from that of the honored president of the day, escaped by leaping from the window and concealing herself in the underbrush. Another woman was scalped and left for dead, but afterwards recovered. Fourteen or fifteen persons were either killed or captured in this fearful onslaught. The Indians, supposed to be the Contocooks, were at once pursued by the people from the central village, but succeeded in effecting their escape. It is said, however, that some of them were killed and buried in a hollow in the old cemetery at the corner, where I find the headstone of the second wife of Dr. Roger Toothaker, bearing this inscription: "Here lies ye body of Sarah Toothaker, wife of Dr. Roger Toothaker, aged 43 years, 7 mos. Died March 8, 1717-18."

In faint and almost illegible letters this record of the tragedy appears on the annals of the town:

Aug. 5, 1695. "This day we received that awfull strooake by the enemy—fifteen persons slain and taken. More sad than we met withall three years before when we met upon the occasion."

It was a fortunate day for Billerica, though not prior to the 18th century, when the Abbot, Bowers, Jaquith, Stickney and Spaulding families came to live in it. They are of that class of people who persist in being friendly to you, whether you will or not. Would you not like a few more such immigrants?

On the 7th of September, 1712, the town was called to mourn the loss of Capt. Jonathan Danforth, one of its most eminent founders, who died at the advanced age of 85 years. He was the leading civil engineer and land surveyor of his time, and kept the records of the town for the space of twenty years.

Most of the farms of this and the neighboring towns were laid out by him, and some of his well-drawn plans are now in my possession. From them the original estates can be in general identified. Truly a poet of that day said of him:

"He rode the circuit, chained great towns and farms
To good behavior; and by well marked stations
He fixed their bounds for many generations."

"An hour before sunset," on the last day of February ensuing, his beloved pastor, the Rev. Samuel Whiting followed him to the silent land. His father was the Rev. Samuel Whiting of Lynn; his mother, Elizabeth, was the sister of Oliver St. John, Lord Chief Justice of England in the time of Oliver Cromwell. He was graduated at Cambridge College in 1653, and married Doreas Chester of Watertown, Nov. 12th, 1656, by whom he had seven sons and four daughters. His son John was killed by the Indians at Lancaster, September 11th, 1697, and his son Samuel was in captivity by the Indians in 1711. Mr. Whiting was a faithful pastor, brave, generous and noble. He was thoroughly identified with the interests of the people; and to his courage, foresight and counsel the town is largely indebted for its salvation from entire destruction by the savages. Well was it said of him:

"Whiting, we here beheld a starry light,
Burning in Christ's right hand and shining bright;
Years seven times seven sent forth his precious rays,
Unto the gospel's profit and Jehovah's praise."

Still incited by the French, the Indians were by no means quiet, and I find that in 1718 Billerica had a company of nineteen "snow-shoe men," whose diversion was to hunt wolves and red men during the rigors of the winter season.

When the famous Capt. John Lovewell, of Dunstable, made his daring expedition against the bold Chieftain Paugus at Pequawket in the spring of 1725, three men, born in Billerica, were of his company. Of these, Jonathan Kittridge fell beside Capt. Lovewell in the very thickest of the fight; Benjamin Kidder, son of James Kidder, was left with a guard, sick at the fort on Lake Ossipee, and recovering, died at the capture of Louisbourg under Pepperell in 1745; and Solomon Kies fought till he had received three wounds, when he cried out to Ensign Seth Wyman: "I'm a dead man!" but still had strength enough remaining to roll himself into a boat in which he was floated across the Lake to the fort at Ossipee. Ensign Seth Wyman, who assumed the command after Lovewell fell, and who, according to the ancient ballad, which our forefathers often sang in the winter evenings by the ample fireside:

"Shot the old chief, Paugus, and did the foe defeat,
Then set his men in order and brought off the retreat,"

married Sarah, daughter of Thomas Ross, of Billerica, January 26, 1715; so that this town, again you see, was at the front when life and liberty were imperilled.*

*See the Expeditions of Capt. John Lovewell, by Frederick Kidder, p. 96.

In 1729 a rib was cut out of Billerica to form a part of the town of Bedford; and five years later, a much larger one to make the town of Tewksbury; still the people multiplied, and the next year, 1738, erected a new meeting-house, sixty feet by forty, which is yet standing on the easterly side of the common.

About this time the Irish potato, best of esculents, was introduced into the town by one of the Manning family, who, for a wonder, raised a bushel as the first crop and used the article as a kind of salad, served up with pepper, salt and vinegar.

In 1753 there were eight colored persons in town, and one of them, Lydia York, was paid £15, old tenor, the ensuing year, for sweeping the meeting-house which was still seated according to "age and pay." A family of the unfortunate Acadians, or French neutrals, from Grand Pre, whose tragic fate has been so touchingly portrayed by Mr. Longfellow in his "Evangeline," was in 1756 billeted on this town. They were treated kindly, the people supplying them with articles of food and raiment at the public expense; as for example, Mr. William Bowers was allowed in 1757 3s. 8d. for supplying the French family with "a bushel of patates and half a bushel of beans." The name of this family was Landeree. It lived in the house of Mrs. Judith Kidder.

Nothing could be done in those days, from the christening of a child to the burial of the dead, without the use of alcohol, and this year the town allowed to "Oliver Abbot 8d. for a quart of Rhum when the old Pound was pulled down." "Deer Reeves" were still chosen, and the "stocks" were kept in repair for the necks of the wicked ones.

On the 26th of January, 1763, Henry Cummings of Hollis, N. H., and H. C. 1760, S.T.D. 1800, was ordained as the fourth minister, his predecessors having been Samuel Whiting, Samuel Ruggles, and John Chandler, and a white day indeed it was for Billerica, since he proved to be a very able and learned divine and faithfully discharged the duties of a pastor here for more than 60 years. He was tall and commanding in person; he had a strong voice and exercised a powerful influence in moulding the minds and in training the hearts of the people. He left as many as seventeen printed sermons and discourses, one of which was preached at the close of a half-century of his ministerial career. There are doubtless persons present who can well remember his tall and dignified form, his three-cornered hat, his white bands, his silver knee-buckles, and the respect and consideration which his venerable presence everywhere commanded. The influence of such a "country parson" is often mightier than that of the fashionable city preacher. It sometimes moves the government and reaches into foreign courts. Under such a minister in Groton the Lawrence family sprang up, whose honored names cities and scientific institutions perpetuate. Dr. Henry Cummings was a patriot who left his mark upon his age, and it is still distinctly visible.

The number of people had in 1765 increased to 1334, of whom fourteen were colored, yet I do not find that they were held as slaves.

But, ladies and gentlemen, a tremendous struggle was impending. The repeated aggressions of the British king and parliament on our rights must be resisted. The principles of freedom, long cherished in the American breast, must come front to front with the tyrannic measures of the English ministry, and that mighty question which affects the destiny of this whole world be solved and settled. Was Billerica now idle? No, ladies and gentlemen, I answer, No! She was one of the first and foremost towns to avow her intention to sustain the cause of liberty, cost what it might. It surprises me to read the record of the resolutions, said to have been mainly drawn up by the Rev. Mr. Cummings, which the town unanimously adopted. As early as December, 1767, the town voted not to use articles imported from abroad, such as "loaf sugar, thread lace, gold and silver buttons, silks, cambrics, women's and children's stays, snuff, mustard, clocks and watches," or indeed anything which could be made at home or was not absolutely needed. On the 29th of August, 1768, the town chose William Stickney, esq. to represent it in a convention to be held in Faneuil Hall "to deliberate on the critical state of public affairs." On the 1st of February, 1773, it voted and resolved "that the late acts of Parliament for raising a revenue in the colonies" and the stationing of fleets to enforce compliance, "are intolerable grievances" and that "they would assist their brethren in the common cause throughout the continent." On the 13th of May, 1774, the town expressed its abhorrence of the act permitting tea to be shipped to America; and I suppose that sassafras, sage and pennyroyal took the place in every family of old Bohea.

It was resolved in town meeting, held on the 6th of June following, "that a right to tax America has no better foundation in equity and reason than the unlimited prerogatives of Prince Charles the First, and James the Second, for the which the one lost his life and the other his kingdom." Mr. Ebenezer Bridge, who had recently come to live in town, Mr. Joshua Abbot, Capt. Josiah Bowers, Mr. Ralph Hill, Dr. Timothy Danforth, Mr. William Thompson and Mr. Solomon Pollard, were then chosen a committee of correspondence.

On the 22d day of September, 1774, it was voted in that old meeting-house whose remnants front the common on the east—it should be as sacred to Billerica as the Old South Church is to Boston—"that our representative pay no regard to the King's new mandamus council, nor proceed to act with them;" and "that if the governor should dissolve, prorogue, or adjourn the court, that our representative joine the house in forming a new congress."

Here, ladies and gentlemen, was the very key-note of the American Revolution, struck by this town in that old church on the 22d day of September, 1774. Let it ring on forever! When official tyranny becomes intolerable, let a new congress come.

At the next meeting the town voted to pay the provincial tax, the sinew of war, into the hands of Henry Gardner of Stow, receiver of the new congress; and on the 3d of January, 1775, to send William Stickney, esq., to represent it in that illustrious body.

On the following day it forwarded forty-eight and one-half bushels of rye, two and one-half bushels of corn, and £5, 7s. 0*½*, in money, to assist the citizens of Boston, and it was agreed on the 3d of April that the inhabitants "entirely discontinue the giving of any gloves at funerals," also that "we will use our utmost efforts to prevent the troops now stationed in Boston from being supplied with materials for annoying the inhabitants of the country," and that "we will not suffer any team to load in, or after loaded, to pass through this town with any timber, boards, spars, pickets, tent-poles, canvas, brick, iron, waggons, carts, carriages, intrenching tools, oats, or any materials for making any of the carriages or implements aforesaid, unless the teamster can produce from one of the committee of correspondence for the town where he loaded, an instrument certifying his name, place of abode, the particulars of his load, the person who sends, and to whom to be delivered." The town also voted that "the alarm list meet and form into a company on the day that the standing companies train." It was also voted, April 14th, "that the town furnish the minute men with bayonets and cartridge boxes."

Thus, resolution after resolution to meet the exigence, was unanimously adopted; and on the 23d day of May, 1776, just one century and forty-two days ago, this town unanimously and gloriously voted,—Dr. Timothy Danforth being moderator—"that if the Hon^{ble} Congress, for the safety of the Colonies, declared them independent of Great Britain, they, the said inhabitants, will engage with their lives and fortunes to support them."

The Honorable Congress did for the safety of those colonies, on the fourth day of July, 1776—just one century ago to-day—"solemnly publish and declare that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, Free and Independent States." This world swung forward when those words were spoken, as when Christ, the son of God, was born,—and the voice of Billerica was not silent.

But did she translate her spirited resolutions into action? Yes, indeed, with the alacrity of men meaning business. Never was a town more alive and wide awake than Billerica in 1775-6. Committees were appointed to hunt up the rusty bayonets, bloodied in the old French war; muskets were repaired and burnished; the stock of powder was replenished; a company of minute men was formed, and the two other companies were drilled weekly on the common.

Here a party was engaged in running bullets; here another in making cartridges; here a group of women was busied in sewing haversacks and blankets, and here a group of children in braiding cord for uniforms. Every man was anxious to possess a firelock, and sometimes much risk was incurred to obtain one. For instance, one of the citizens of Billerica, Thomas Ditson, junior, who happened to be in Boston on the 9th of March, 1775, was, while endeavoring to purchase a musket of a British soldier, arrested under the pretence that he was tempting him to desert. Having tarred and feathered "the Yankee," as they called him, a company of Col. Nesbit's regiment fastened him to a chair, placed it upon a truck and escorted him through the streets, the band playing "Yankee Doodle," to the "Liberty Tree" and then set him free. He afterwards obtained

a gun and did good service with it through the Revolution. It were far more honorable to wear a coat of tar and feathers in the cause of liberty than of gold lace in that of those who thus insulted him. It was on this occasion that the rebel tune, "Yankee Doodle," had for the first time English words set to its rollicksome measures.

"Yankee Doodle came to town
For to buy a firelock,
We will tar and feather him,
And so we will John Hancock."

But the distinguished patriot they had not the pleasure of so dressing; and it is well known to you that in a most critical moment a few weeks later, Mr. Amos Wyman, of Billerica, afforded him and Samuel Adams a shelter.*

When the alarm of the advance of 800 British grenadiers on Lexington, April 19, 1775, reached Billerica, the bell was rung, the drums beat to arms, and Capt. Jonathan Stickney's company with that of Capt. Edward Farmer and the minute men were immediately on the march towards Concord. They arrived in season to annoy the British in their retreat through Lincoln, and during the sharp skirmish in that town one of our men, Nathaniel Wyman, fell, and John Nichols and Timothy Blanchard were wounded. Discovering a red-coat making ready to fire at him from behind a tree, Lt. Asa Spaulding, grandfather of our beloved Dea. Edward Spaulding, leveled his gun at him and saw him fall. On his return to town he brought with him a captive soldier, whom he kept for some time at his house in the west part of the town, as "a specimen of the red-coats."

It is well known to you, ladies and gentlemen, that old Bunker Hill was first baptized with Billerica blood. Asa Pollard, who lived near the Fordway, was the first man killed in that sanguinary battle. In May preceding, at the old Pollard tavern house, still standing, Ebenezer Bridge was elected colonel, and Dr. John Brooks, of Medford, afterwards governor of the state, major of the 27th regiment of foot, which embraced Capt. Jonathan Stickney's company of volunteers from Billerica.

On Friday evening, June 16th, Col. Bridge's regiment, with packs and entrenching tools, commenced its march towards Charlestown, and at twelve o'clock that starry night, with the men of war on the right and left, the British army on the front, began silently to raise the little redoubt, just where the monument now stands. There might have been in all 1200 men. They worked on steadily and unobserved until the morning broke, when the booming of the guns of the British frigate "Lively" wakened General Howe and his whole army to the situation. Soon the whole fleet opened a concentric fire upon the fort; yet still the men within worked on. But one shot from the "Somerset," lying at the ferry, took effect, and that struck off the head of Asa Pollard, an old Indian hunter of Billerica, spattering the blue coat of Col. Prescott and the fresh earth with his gore. "What shall be done?" enquired a comrade. "Bury him!" replied the

* See Charles Hudson's History of Lexington, p. 173.

gallant Prescott. "What! without prayers?" "Yes!" said the commander of the day, "bury him and let the work go on," and then he walked with folded arms along the crest of the embankment to inspire his raw recruits with confidence. In the terrific onslaught that followed, Billerica lost Timothy Toothaker, Benjamin Easty, Benjamin Wilson and Samuel Hill. Col. Bridge was twice wounded. The musket did the praying on that day.

This battle changed the destiny of the world. It was the first grand resistance on the field of freemen against kingly usurpation. It was the inscription of those rights in letters of blood which make this nation over every other nation glorious; and the very first letter of that inscription was made by Asa Pollard of Billerica. His name therefore is known, and will be known in story. The town continued to exhibit the same patriotic spirit, raising its full quota of men and money, through the Revolution. It was bravely represented in all the great battles of the war.

On the 22d of June, 1779, the town elected the Rev. Henry Cummings as its delegate to the convention for the formation of the state constitution; and when Daniel Shays in 1786 rebelled against the state authority, the town sent its company of artillery through a January snow storm, under command of Major Jonathan Stickney, to guard the court at Cambridge. This gallant officer died April 30th, 1802, and sleeps in yonder cemetery. His wife bore the singular name of Silence, so that every time he called her to his side he bade her keep her tongue still. He named his only daughter Silence.*

The town soon recuperated from the exhausting effect of the Revolution, and many improvements were, from time to time, introduced. The stocks were knocked overboard, a more liberal style of living was adopted, and the old homesteads gradually assumed a neater and more beautiful appearance. A post-office was established in 1790, under the management of Mr. Jonathan Bowers. Some five years later, a stage-coach passed through the town, making its way from Amherst, N. H., to Boston in about two days. It was "the sensation" of the period.

On the 7th of January, 1798, the fourth meeting-house was dedicated, and its fine architectural proportions indicate the taste of the people at that time.

Notwithstanding the depletion of the population by the formation of Carlisle, in 1780, the town at the commencement of the present century contained 1383 inhabitants, and perhaps "the Corner," where the stages parted for Salem[†], was the busiest section.

In 1808 a clock, the bequest of the good Dea. Joshua Abbot, who also left the town a legacy for the support of sacred music, was placed upon the tower of the church.

The Orthodox meeting-house was dedicated January 30, 1830, and in the year ensuing, the Baptist meeting-house at the "Corner," which was subsequently removed to the centre of the town.

* See the Stickney Family, p. 126.

On the 29th of May, 1855, the town held a grand bi-centennial celebration, and listened to an eloquent address from the Hon. Joseph Richardson, a distinguished native of the place, who grew up under the tutelage of the Rev. Dr. Cummings.

When the last war broke out in 1861, Billerica was as prompt as in the old Revolution to respond to the call of duty. From N. D. P. Foster, the first man who enlisted, we reckon one hundred and forty-seven soldiers and seamen furnished by this town; and from New Orleans to Gettysburg, the sods of the battlefield drank their blood.

By his munificence an honored citizen of the town established a Baptist church to meet the wants of the increasing population of North Billerica; and soon afterwards a Romanist church arose in that locality for the accommodation of our Catholic brethren.

In respect to education, this town has ever manifested a lively interest. As early as 1679, the good Dea. Joseph Thompson taught the children how "to read and write;" there were also "women schole dames," who either scolded or kept school—perhaps they did a little of both. Master Jonathan Kidder, II. C. 1751, was long a noted teacher here. He kept what was called a "moving school," and the town was divided into "squadrons" for this purpose. There was a grammar school-house at the Centre as early as 1757. Dr. Ebenezer Pemberton had a respectable academy here from 1797 to 1808; and from 1821 to 1836 "the Billerica Academy" shed its genial rays of light through the community. "The Howe School," founded by the liberality of the distinguished physician, Dr. Zadok Howe, and dedicated May 31, 1852, is a benison to this whole region, and our public schools, sustained by an annual appropriation of about \$3,200, are as good as any in the state.

As a result of this long continued interest in the cause of education, Billerica has produced its full quota of distinguished men and women, teachers, orators, advocates, statesmen, physicians and divines, whose names, did time permit, I very gladly would repeat. But among this number I cannot forbear to mention that of Major Samuel Parker, the original inventor of the leather-splitting machine, by which millions of dollars have been added to the wealth of the country; that of Miss Elizabeth Peabody, author of many valuable works on education; and, do you think, ladies and gentlemen, that New Hampshire ever had a better governor than Onslow Stearns, or this old Bay State than Thomas Talbot?

Above most of our other towns, Billerica has, from the outset, been felicitous in her professional and public men. From honest Joseph Thompson down to Samuel Tucker, it has had good teachers; from the Rev. Samuel Whiting down to the present reverend pastors, it has had good preachers. Its deacons have been honest deacons. Its physicians, from Dr. Roger Toothaker down to Dr. George Albert Monroe, sustain a noble record; and its military men have done their duty. Hence, as I believe, the town has, from the start, been making progress; slow indeed, but certain, to this very hour.

This progress, like the growth of these tall pines that breathe their music over us, has been so gradual as to escape daily observation; but compare it by long periods, as from 1776 to 1876, and it becomes very distinctly visible. Please think of it! In 1776 it took the town a year or more, and gallons of grog, to throw a bridge across this Concord river; now you do it as a pastime, with the best of all beverages, cold water.

Then the ladies came to church on pillions, or on foot; but now they ride in decent carriages. Then the only musical instrument in the church was an old wooden pitch-pipe; now you listen to the sweet-toned organ. Then they sat through the Rev. Dr. Cummings' long discourse with frozen toes and fingers; now the furnace and the stove impart their genial warmth.

Then the school-books were the "New England Primer" and the "Psalter;" now they present the finest specimens of our English literature. Then the children were pushed up the ladder of learning by the tingling twigs of the white birch tree; now they ascend much higher by the sweet music of persuasion.

Then the plow was but a crooked stick with a wooden coulter; now it is an instrument fit for a king to follow. Then brown bread and Indian pudding, boiled so hard that you could roll it as a nine-pin ball across the floor, were the main pabulum; now you have the finest flour, and refined sugar to sweeten it.

Then the odiferous dye-pot stood in the capacious chimney-corner, the clumsy hand-loom near it; now the comfortable stove, and the elegant piano take the place of them.

Then the town had several haunted houses, and almost every person stood in fear of evil spirits, spectres, apparitions; now the ghosts and goblins have gone under.

Then they lighted the houses, church and all, by dim tallow candles, started by a flint and tinder box; now you have the brilliant gas, or kerosene.

Then they carried on a courtship, sitting in high-backed pine settees, or *settles*, as they called them, until the birds began to sing in the morning; now you sit on crimson cushioned sofas, and, I hope, retire in season.

Then what the Rev. Henry Cummings thought and taught was "law and gospel;" now you have opinions of your own, and dare to avow them. Then they had no instruments of martial music but the drum, the fife and trumpet; now you have a military band of many pieces. Then they had no poet here; now you have one of the seventh generation from an original settler, who rhymes as easily as the flowers exhale their perfume. Then this town had no manufactories; now you make woolens, dye-stuffs, chemicals for the millions.

Then many persons in the town could not spell "Billerica;" now, I think, all over ten years old can do it—some way.

So you see the marks of progress everywhere, and none except the author of "The Lost Arts" thinks that we and all the rest of the world are going the other way. Each generation passing has left us something, and have we not then some reason, ladies and gentlemen, as we behold our present prosperity as a town, the virtue, intelligence, industry, urbanity and comfort of our people, now in

the commencement of another century, looming up with a resplendence hitherto unknown,—have we not, I ask, some reason to thank God to-day, and take courage for new enterprise and higher vantage ground?

But what is to be done? Much, every way, but most respectfully I would suggest these points:

I. Our town records, which have been admirably kept, from Danforth down to Foster, need immediate attention. They are among our most precious treasures, worthy to be set in gold; but the early books are worn and torn—in part illegible. Should not then some person, well skilled in ancient script, be employed, as soon as possible, to transcribe them? For what is the use in recording unless we take pains to preserve the record?

II. From the faint tracings I have this hour presented from these records, is it not evident that this town has done some things worthy to be printed in the form of a local history? Well, then, shall not measures be adopted, ere the early records perish, and the dear old people pass away, for the accomplishment of such a work?

III. The town has generously raised a granite monument to perpetuate the memory of those brave men who fell in our late war. Will it not then consent to lift another shaft upon its beautiful common, that shall bear on one side the names of those killed by the Indians, on another face the names of those killed in the old French war, and still on another front the names of those who were lost in the great Revolution? And should not the name of Asa Pollard lead the roll of honor?

IV. Will you permit me also to submit whether the ancient central cemetery, which enshrines the sacred dust of so many worthies of this town, which strangers come from afar to visit, and to trace therefrom their genealogies, has received those decorative touches which the taste of this progressive age demands?

V. Also with great respect I would remind you that, with all its improvements, Billerica still needs a public library, in which the literary productions of its sons and daughters, together with the relies of the olden times and specimens of the natural curiosities of the place, might be preserved for the instruction and divulgation of the people, and then,

VI. For the benefit of us all who are, and are to come, may I not just breathe—a railroad! Yes, a railroad, and these whispering pines seem to respond—"a railroad!" This centennial year, a railroad, just to waken us from our slumbers, and to let the outside world realize that Billerica still lives! Nature has made the pathway, the means are in your hands. Business demands it, you can have it if you will. Now will you have it? But these are not sermonic applications; they are merely whisperings to men of wisdom.

As she now stands, Billerica is a grand old historic town, full of dear associations, scenic beauty, and generous hearted people,—a fair gem in the diadem of the nation!

I have travelled over these United States and observed, to some extent, the habits and the industries of the people; I have crossed the sea, and studied long the cities, towns and villages, the customs and the institutions of old Europe, and I can, from the innermost chamber of my heart, affirm that I have found in this wide world, no kinder, better, happier people than in Billerica; no spot where I would rather live, or sleep my final sleep.

But our felicity, ladies and gentlemen, consists in progress. Then shall we not aspire to be a still kinder, lovelier, wiser, heavenlier community. Shall we not still rise in strength and beauty, and, as our centennial elm ascends from year to year, and spreads forth its graceful branches and its verdant foliage, comforting and protecting many, shall not we thus lifting our arms heavenward, grow in eyery grace and virtue, and pass the loveliness of noble deeds onward to the coming generations, so that the speaker at the next centennial, in looking back may trace a still grander progress than we have done, and most devoutly say, as we now do, GOD BLESS THE TOWN OF BILLERICA!

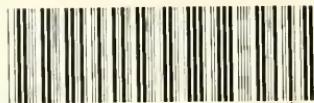


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